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ABSTRACT

The state of ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church is of greater quality than its critics claim, and the state of United Methodist theological education is of greater quality than its critics claim. The following factors support this position: (1) the morale of the vast majority of United Methodist clergy is good; (2) the ministerial covenant is alive and well across the church; (3) the quality of ministerial candidates is overall better than it was prior to 1977 when a new candidacy program began; and (4) the perception of theological education by those charged with qualifications and standards for ministry is that the United Methodist seminaries are far better than their critics claim. The contemporary church has the following specific expectations for its theological schools: help in renewing the ministry as a profession, increased connectedness to congregational life, and renewed understanding of United Methodist mission in the contemporary world. Includes 19 reference notes. (JDD)

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No. 83, May 1, 1990

CHURCH AND ACADEMY

Donald H. Treese

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Bob Neville's letter read: "What we would like from you is your perspective on (a) the widespread perception of declining quality in ministerial candidates; (b) church-academic interaction; (c) and what the church wants from the seminaries and how it expresses that want."

My perspective on these issues is offered amid a cacophony of voices, akin to the voices of panic in the midst of some natural disaster—at times all talking at once—sometimes at one another, sometimes over one another—seldom in unison and frequently contradicting one another. The time is one of aftershocks following an ecclesiastical earthquake, wherein a shifting of the landscape for mainline Protestantism has occurred. There is no better example than United Methodism: in one generation from growth and dominance to decline and loss of influence. The shift has been well documented, though the good old days of the 1950s were not quite as good as many would have us believe. In terms of the percentage of population that was United Methodist, we were in decline even then, as indeed we had been prior to World War II.

The aftershocks of this ecclesiastical quake have consisted of a decade of criticism, fault-finding, and finger-pointing, most of it directed at leadership—particularly at pastors and those who train the pastors. Into this environment of shakes and aftershakes, I venture a personal perspective. It is not a perspective from within the academy but it comes from one who is a supporter of the academy, one who has spent his ministry in debt to it. It is a perspective informed primarily by listening for more than ten years to Boards of Ordained Ministry as they give frontline, hands-on, first-person attention to the enlistment and qualification of persons for ordained ministry. It stems from advising and counseling these board members (90 percent of whom are pastors) as they deal in the trenches with issues of calling, nurture, effectiveness, competence, integrity, and the large human agenda that is woven into the covenant of ordained ministers in 73 annual conferences. And it is the perspective of observing, studying, and working with thirteen United Methodist seminaries in the interest of furthering the partnership they have with these boards in equipping persons to fulfill their calling to serve the present and future age.

From that position, I am led to affirm that the state of ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church is far better and of greater quality than its critics claim, and the state of United Methodist theological education is far better and of greater quality than its critics claim.

The morale of the vast majority of United Methodist clergy is good. More than a dozen annual conferences across the church have undertaken studies of clergy morale because some of the fault-finding alluded to earlier has painted a dark picture of low morale leading to a leadership malaise that is causing the church to tumble.[1] These conference studies reveal that the great majority of clergy and spouses feel a real sense of personal and professional fulfillment,

claiming the church has provided good opportunities for the expression of their calling and that their ministry has developed much as they expected over the years. When I hear a lot of the negative criticism, I look behind the critics and realize that if any of us would spend two-thirds of our time dealing with 10 to 15 percent of our faculty or trustees who are problems (as superintendents and bishops do with problem clergy), we might conclude that faculties are generally in disarray, lacking commitment and purpose, and bringing the theological schools to despair and decline. The fact is, based on grassroots surveys, morale is not a serious problem for most clergy—for no more than 10 percent of active pastors.

The ministerial covenant is alive and well across the church, expressing itself at its best in a variety of personal, informal, collegial, and supportive ways that are not statistically measurable, and seldom noticed unless it is at the funeral of a sister or brother in the covenant. A month ago, Sharon Hels, editor of *Quarterly Review*, and I brought together a representative panel of clergy who spent two days reflecting and sharing about the ministerial covenant. You will read the results of this roundtable in the spring issue of *Quarterly Review*. It will not make headlines, but in terms of the covenant, the ordained ministry of the United Methodist Church is far better and of greater quality than its critics claim.

The quality of ministerial candidates is overall better than it was prior to 1977 when a new candidacy program began. Prior to 1977, there tended to be an "open admissions" policy for ordained ministry with church authentication of a sense of call to ministry coming late in a candidate's movement to ordination. Since 1977, slightly over 21,000 persons have enrolled in candidacy studies for ordained ministry. Tracking these candidates through qualifying stages, only about half are being received into probationary membership in the annual conferences. Evidence abounds that there is no open admissions policy for the ordained ministry today. Although the candidacy process must be continually refined, persons are now being challenged to explore the implications of the call to ministry and evaluated at the local church, district, and conference level as never before. The *inward call* is being accompanied by the *outward call* of validation within the faith community. The historic questions Wesley first asked at the conference of 1776 have been given new seriousness over these dozen years of candidacy experience:

1. *Do they know God as a pardoning God?* Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire nothing but God? Are they holy in all manner of conversation?
2. *Have they gifts as well as evidence of God's grace for the work?* Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of *salvation* by faith? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?
3. *Have they fruit?* Have any been truly convinced of sin and converted to God, and are believers edified by their preaching?

"As long as these marks concur in them, we believe they are called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient proof that they are moved by the Holy Spirit."[2] The maturity and quality of the ministry has been enhanced by second-career candidates and increasing numbers of women.

The perception of theological education by those charged with qualifications and standards for ministry is that the United Methodist seminaries are far better and of greater quality than their critics claim. John Updike's recent indictment of theological schools in his novel, *Roger's Version*, finds little support among those who observe seminarians up close. Updike's estimate is that:

> Believing souls are trucked into divinity school like muddy, fragrant cabbages from the rural hinterland, and in three years of fine distinctions and exegetical quibbling, we have chopped them into coleslaw salable at any suburban supermarket. We take

in saints and send out ministers to be workers in the vineyard of inevitable anxiety and discontent.

The affirming perception of United Methodist seminaries by those charged with qualifications is strong and clear, particularly at a time when Boards of Ordained Ministry are finding almost half their students attending non-United Methodist seminaries.

In this regard, it has been well documented that the reasons United Methodist students go to non-United Methodist seminaries are overwhelmingly more geographical than theological, more practical than matters of quality. "Near home" is next to denominational identity as the most prevalent reason for a student's choice of seminary. If a seminary other than United Methodist is located "near home," almost 40 percent will choose that school. The convenience and need for student appointments and the financial considerations of second-career students are also compelling factors.

When we have explored the quality of United Methodist theological education with conference boards, we find a strong affirmation of the seminaries as institutions of academic quality, seeking to be responsive to the sometimes incredible expectations of the church. This evaluation reflects the strong affirmation of theological education which the congregations of the denomination express in their financial support of these thirteen schools. The apportionment system is an on-going referendum on all sorts of causes in the church, millions of United Methodists voting their approval or disapproval each week.

Over a twenty-year period, $150 million has been provided by local churches to the seminaries. This generous recognition of the quality of the schools and the vast majority of its graduates serving as pastors of these supporting congregations is even stronger when the amount provided for ministerial education at the conference level is included—making the total support for ministerial education over two decades to be more than $225 million.

And this support is given without any serious effort at intrusion into the internal governance of the schools, control of their curriculum, or certification of their faculty. One cannot find support of such magnitude to any cluster of schools with fewer strings attached. (The Southern Baptist Convention offering a painful contrast.)

As noted earlier, this perspective on ordained ministry and theological education runs counter to so much of what we are bombarded with within our denomination. Some critics speak of ineffectiveness and incompetence among pastors as if it were a new phenomenon. The *Journals and Letters of Wesley* are evidence that it is not new. What is new is that the denomination now has in place a consultation process and evaluation procedures for clergy and congregations that will not permit ineffectiveness and incompetence the luxury of being hidden under bureaucratic bushes—or skillfully moved from one unknowing congregation to another. The reality is not new; its coming to increasing light is new! And there are humane and supportive procedures in place to deal with ineffectiveness and incompetence if those in authority only have the wisdom and will to employ them.

Some of our critics are "experts" who have themselves not served as pastors of churches for so long that their reference points are more nostalgic than factual. Some of our critics are loose cannons manned by certain groups within the church whose survival is dependent on pushing various buttons on a gigantic panel called Discontent—buttons variously labeled abortion, homosexuality, evangelism, clergy-bashing, and anything liberal—buttons carefully wired to the fiscal needs of the group. Perhaps the seminaries and clergy must assume the ancient role of scapegoat when the denomination finds itself in what one church leader describes as a three-I crisis: *an identity crisis* that asks the question *who* are we? *an intentional crisis* that asks *what* are we doing? and *an institutional crisis* that asks the question *how* are we to do it?[3]

Historically, renewal in the church has depended on those questions being asked in that proper sequence. Today, most of what I read raises the questions in reverse order, a perversity that reflects a victory of superficiality over substance, of function over form, and methodology over mission. A moratorium on "how to do it solutions" and an emphasis on "who are we issues" is long, long overdue.

Until the denomination recovers its equilibrium enough to reorder the questions, I say, we who are charged with pastoral leadership and the training of it may have to serve as scapegoats; but I for one propose that it's near the time we tell our critics and their furies to get off our backs and let us work with them to bring a renewed sense of vitality to the denomination.

This confronts us with the expectations which the church holds specifically for its theological schools. Maintaining that the state and quality of ordained ministry and theological education is generally sound and good does not mean that all is well. By no means! As I review the expectations of the church, there is much work to be done; a number of things that you need to do better; some things you need to begin doing that you are not doing; and some things you might well consider not doing.

In the *Book of Discipline* the United Methodist Church lists eight expectations of its seminaries: to educate ordained ministers; to clarify the church's faith through research and prophetic inquiry in behalf of the whole church; to prepare students for effective ministry for Christ in the church; to acquaint students with current programs of the church such as its educational, missional, social, and other service programs; to provide practical experience in administration, stewardship, and other such concerns of order; acquaint them with the polity, organization and terminology of the church; provide courses in United Methodist History, Doctrine, and Polity; and share with Boards of Ordained Ministry responsibility for the selection and education of candidates.[4]

These expectations are so comprehensive that I expect they will remain much the same for the foreseeable future. But comprehensiveness requires specificity for implementation. From these general expectations, it is my judgment that the contemporary church specifically most wants the following from its seminaries:

1. Help in renewing the ministry as a profession.
2. Increased connectedness to congregational life.
3. Renewed understanding of United Methodist mission in the contemporary world.

First, the church expects help in renewing the ministry as a profession.

The issue of professionalism could exhaust this paper, this meeting, and deliberations far beyond it. It is the hottest item in seminary-church discussion these days with no sight of cooling any time soon. Has professionalism in ministry become distorted into gross careerism on the part of clergy more concerned with status and security than service? Has rampant professionalism fostered an elitism that badly divides clergy and laity, blurring the complementary nature of ordained and general ministry?

Are Roger Finke and Rodney Stark on to something in their recent article in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* when they claim that: "Methodists began to slump at precisely the same time that their amateur clergy were replaced by professionals who claimed episcopal authority over congregations." Have the seminaries contributed mightily to this distortion and division by their own professional bent, so captivated by a guild mentality that a sense of responsibility to people in the pews has almost disappeared? Within this room, we may find the verdict "not guilty on all counts" rather easy, but the perception, the feeling, the hurt is out there that each charge has evidence sufficient for both church and seminary to explore it.

In addressing the issue of professionalism in ministry, I am convinced that the laity of the church want their ministerial leadership to be "professional." For them "professional" translates as "well-trained" in the classic disciplines, with special emphasis on the Bible. The laity want their clergy to be good preachers and sensitive pastors possessing leadership skills in the vital work of sharing in the witness and work of the parish. As Carroll, Hoge, and Sheets recently discovered in their study of clergy costs in congregational life, laity feel pastors need "professional training" if their gifts are to be fully expressed and shared with them, and they much prefer professionally trained pastors and priests.[5] The laity want professional leadership, but they assume the professionals also identify themselves as *servants*.

The key question then is which model of professionalism do we refer to when we talk about it. I have found instructive John Cobb's account of his personal wrestling with professionalism in ministry.[6] He recounts that his initial distaste for it was a reaction to that model of professionalism found among physicians, lawyers, engineers, that had its origins in the nineteenth century duality of theory and practice. This model attributes to professionals a knowledge not available to those they serve. The professionals are the experts whose authoritative answers are simply to be accepted and followed.

Can the ministry be a profession in this sense? Cobb believes that seminaries have given some substance to such a view. The increasing requirements for the education of ministers have so widened the gap between a minister's knowledge of Scripture, theology, and church history and that of the laity, that the result is an abundance of *esoteric lore* that provides the minister with little or no guidance in relating what he or she knows to the needs of the church. To quote Cobb:

> For theological schools to encourage ministers to think of themselves as professionals in this modern sense is unwarranted, and the effort to play the professional role leads to inauthenticity. It has seriously damaged the Christian ministry. If this is what it means to be a professional, then seminaries should join with others in attacking the professionalization of the ministry.[7]

For Cobb the model of the professional as one who shares knowledge and experience; who envisions, inspires, encourages, and guides the church to what God calls it to be and do is that of the "practical theologian"—elaborated in the volume he coauthored with Joe Hough, *Christian Identity and Theological Education*. You are familiar with the final chapter of that book and its proposals on how seminaries might proceed in educating students to assume this stance in their ministry to local congregations.

Some years earlier, Tom Trotter said much the same thing when he wrote:

> The glory of the ordained ministry in my view is this: the minister is the last generalist in a society that has become so overly specialized that humane services and wholeness are difficult to find. In this sense, the ordained minister may again become the parson (person) in the community, not because he or she is necessarily the most learned as in an earlier time, but because he or she is the most whole in their world view. . . .We need revelatory events that suggest to us the need for response in joy and excitement. Professional ministry that is shared with the whole ministry is potentially that kind of event. Ministry that is kept from the whole ministry as a commodity or professional guild or a cosmic secret, the church may well decide it does not need.[8]

We have discussed in this conference the anticlerical trends abroad in the church. It may be that this movement is more an expression of frustration than it is hostility toward clergy.

In an increasingly inclusive society and denomination, the covenant of the clergy is too often perceived as a secret order from which laity feel excluded because that covenant has not been adequately interpreted to them. Without interpretation, it is very easy to see this covenant more as a union devoted to self-promotion than a covenant dedicated to nurture and service. The responsibility lies with those within the covenant to interpret its true nature and potential to the general meeting out of which it arises. Otherwise, the frustration level will continue to increase and express itself in a variety of ways, including legislation.

How to preserve the best of professionalism in the training of ministers is a primary agenda item for serious dialogue between the seminaries and the church. There are already regularly scheduled sessions between seminary deans and presidents and the Council of Bishops Committee on Theological Education. However, the conversation needs to be broadened to include recognized effective pastors who embody the wholistic model of professionalism that has slipped too much from view.

A stimulating book that United Methodists may not know about, and which I highly commend to all seminary leadership, is *The Education of Ministers for the Coming Age*, by Ronald Osborn, noted Disciples of Christ scholar recently retired after a distinguished career as teacher and administrator. One of his conclusions is that: "The key to the problem of professional education lies in the seminaries; professing to take ministry seriously, they seem not to have taken ministers seriously."[9]

The church values a *service-oriented* professionalism among its clergy. It very much wants the seminaries to help in renewing and revaluing our understanding of the professional minister.

Second, the church expects the seminaries to establish closer connections to congregational life.

Ron Osborn writes:

> Ministerial education finds it too easy to stay within the safety of the book. All too rarely does it directly engage the human and divine reality of raw experience. How can that be done, bringing students into living encounter with persons who have known intense sorrow, fear, suffering, joy, conversion, hope? Perhaps it can be done only rarely. . . .But the concern for professional education will be met not by increasing the number of formal courses detailing 'professional' approaches to particular problems, but by bringing students to confront a human reality with all of the resources of their biblical, theological, and technical knowledge.[10]

I suppose the most oft-quoted definition of what a seminary is comes from H. Richard Niebuhr in his mid-century work, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*: "The theological school is the intellectual center of the church's life."[11] From the perspective of the church, the quote is heard too often without due regard to the qualifier in it. A seminary is the intellectual center of the church's life. Or worse, it is rare to find the quote fully stated in context, namely, that "the purpose of a seminary's work is the same as the purpose of the church: to increase among God's people the love of God and companions." Or as Sallie McFague put it more recently: "How do we form and shape a community in which students may see and not lose sight of the need for rigorous academic life, nor the ultimate goal of such work—increasing among people the love of God and neighbor."

We are not pressing a modern point but one which first appears in Paul's writings, namely, that theology grows out of the church's life; its life does not grow out of its theology. From my own seminary preparation for pastoral ministry, the observation of Jaroslav Pelikan finds support over and over again: namely, the great theological systems are hammered out in pulpits before congregations at worship. A congregation is already living out a theology or theologies

when a new pastor arrives—a theology that has grown out of its life and witness, successes and failures, and in cooperation with a succession of professionally trained ministers.

The congregation as a partner in theological education is the focus of renewed interest and attention, quickened by the seminal work of James Hopewell on congregations and the recent responses to his work edited by Hough and Wheeler. In his work, "Hopewell questioned the persistent emphasis on the development of the individual clergyperson as the object of theological education. [He] called for a new departure in theological studies, one that would result in a fundamentally revised curriculum, different in form and focus, that shifts theological education from a clerical to a congregational paradigm. In this new program, the object of theological education would no longer be the formation of the individual minister. Rather, it would be the development of the life and faith of the congregation."[12]

Beyond Clericalism, the Hough/Wheeler volume, presents cogent arguments for and against this dramatic, if not radical, proposal for a shift in focus; and theological educators will make individual and collective responses to it. For the church it is heartening that there is, from within the academy, research, discussion, and proposals concerning the development of the life and form of congregations, however that is ultimately translated into the internal life of the seminaries. For the church it is heartening because, as Marjorie Suchocki has noted: "The seminary succumbs far too easily to the temptation to develop idealized notions of the church against which the real churches of cities and towns and countrysides are too often found wanting. The concrete churches are frequently strangers to the abstract ecclesiologies of the academy. . . ."[13]

Recently, I sat in a meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee of a seminary board of trustees. The school is preparing for ATS accreditation review. In response to a question from the dean as to what they saw as the major needs of the church the seminary should be responding to, the following were offered:

1. Produce graduates who can lead people to Christ in diverse ways in a diverse world.
2. Prepare pastors who will equip congregations for mission—not pastors who want to do it all.
3. Make connections between evangelical and liberation theologies.
4. Train pastors to minister in forms relevant to different needs and life-styles of congregations.
5. Help develop a pastoral devotional life which nurtures and empowers ministry.
6. The seminary should try and embody the character of the church we want students to live out in ministry.
7. Train pastors who won't let people assume things are always going to be the way they are now.

With the growing awareness of the ministry of all Christians in United Methodism; the realization that our restructuring and denominational posturing on a host of issues for 20 years has occurred without much concern for the implications for congregational life; with articulate leadership among the laity beginning to question and speak and write on theological, social, and political issues, the United Methodist Church needs to increase its appreciation for the powerful role smaller units have played in the effective witness of historic and contemporary Methodism. The congregations of our denominations understandably want to be heard as well as seen, and what we have is a marvelous moment of opportunity for seminaries and congregations to cooperate in preparing the leadership which a new age with new challenges and needs demands.

I am not as certain *how* this new partnership should be shaped as I am that it *must* if we are to avoid special-interest political and theological groups from moving into resource congregations with all kinds of alternative programs and materials. In *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, Hough and Cobb sketch how they perceive the role of churches in professional

education for ministry. Noting early attempts to employ experienced pastors as faculty and observing field education programs and internships of uneven variety, cost and success, they propose that after graduation from seminary ministers be given the status of "probationary ordinands" with churches assuming the major responsibility for reflective practice.[14]

Although written for an ecumenical audience, their proposal uniquely identifies with United Methodism since we are one major denomination that has the concept of "probationary ordinand" already in place. Since our seminaries do not qualify candidates for ordination, but rather the annual conferences, the denomination has moved over the past generation to understand preparation for ministry as more than formal theological education. One year beyond the Master of Divinity degree was added, then the current two years, to provide opportunity for seminary graduates to reflect on the practice of ministry in congregational settings. Leadership is to be given by Boards of Ordained Ministry and cabinets to this two-year period of reflection, practical instruction, and mentoring, at the end of which the probationer must answer satisfactorily such questions as:

1. How has the practice of ministry affected your experience and understanding of God?
2. What effect has the practice of ministry had on your understanding of humanity and the need for divine grace?
3. What changes has the practice of ministry had on your understanding of the lordship of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit?
4. Describe the nature and ministry of the church. What are its primary tasks today?
5. How do you conceive your vocation as an ordained minister?

Boards of Ordained Ministry across the church are seeking to make this two-year period of reflective practice fully meaningful. Sixty-four conferences report having some type of program in place for probationary ordinands and the reflective practice of ministry by recent graduates.

Later this month, the Division of Ordained Ministry is calling together a representative design team to begin planning a strategy to renew and extend the counseling elder program in Methodism. With input and direct assistance from the seminaries, we are interested in designing a training program for these counseling elders or mentors that will qualify them to counsel, train, and lead seminary graduates into a better understanding and preparation for ministry in the congregations of annual conferences. These mentors would need to be certified for this connecting role between seminary and congregation, and they could be used by both the seminary and Board of Ordained Ministry in fulfilling this role—a modern version of the "Brush College" of early American Methodism.

We want this emerging resource to the annual conferences to counter the ping-pong game that goes on between the church and the schools: wherein the church blames the seminary for not doing what seminaries do not have time to do, while the church itself takes little responsibility for training new clergy in the intricacies of pastoral leadership in ways that seminaries simply cannot. This has been the contention of Loren Mead for some years. He writes:

> What is needed is sustained attention and care for seminary graduates going through the transition period. It should not be undertaken as a new program for two or three years of enthusiasm, then dropped. Every seminary graduate should receive training as she or he experiences that exciting and also traumatic journey across the boundary from the seminary culture into the church culture.[15]

There is nothing we could do that would make congregations more a focus for theological education. There is nothing we could do that would more connect the seminaries with congregations. Nothing we could do would more overcome the recent commentary of a younger district superintendent, that apart from courses in History, Doctrine, and Polity—which he could have more conveniently taken at a non-United Methodist seminary closer home—he sensed no

real United Methodist presence or connection during his three years on one of our campuses—no acquaintance with current missional and educational programs of the church—no practical experience in administration and stewardship—no evidence of research and prophetic inquiry in behalf of the whole church. Nothing we could do would more realize the common goal stated by Jim Laney: "The seminary is not just another graduate school; rather it is an attempt to combine faith, experience, and parish involvement with theological reflection. Theological education must assist in affirming our identification with the people of God in the common ground of the church."

Third, the church expects the seminaries to provide leadership for a renewed understanding of mission in the contemporary world.

Leonard Sweet has observed that:

> The United Methodist Church boasts the best trained, hardest working, most motivated clergy it has ever seen. Yet, the United Methodist Church is getting less and less results from its clergy than ever before. Why? Because we are geared up for 'a world we have lost' ministry. We are captivated by 'a world that is no more' syndrome. A fundamental transformation of the human consciousness has taken place. The reigning world view is breaking down all around us, as a new understanding of life is springing forth. We have not yet faced up to many of the consequences of this change on the Christian consciousness . . . .If the truth be told, a church filled with 'yesterday's people' is precisely what ministerial leadership has been trained for. Every Sunday morning an urban culture of electronic circuitry and technological wizardry is expected to step into a ecclesiastical time warp.[16]

The congregations of local churches want ministerial leadership that will help them make some sense of "the change a minute" world in which they live, love, work, raise families, and where they laugh and suffer and cry and die. The nostalgia craze has passed for a new generation. They don't want to turn the clock back. They don't want the world to stop so they can get off. But they do want, and need desperately, pastors and other leaders to help them understand what is going on around them socially, scientifically, globally from a religious perspective. They spend most of their time trying to make sense of it all for the corporation, the firm, the factory, the institution, but for themselves they keep coming to the church seeking something more than secondhand stories without power and without relevance to where they are and what they have to face day by day.[17]

Given these expectations in the contemporary church world, it is clear the seminaries must find creative ways to speak out to the church and to the world on issues begging for explanation among clergy and laity and the world for resolution. This is the point powerfully stated by the Mudflower Collective in *God's Fierce Whimsy*—a celebration of theological education for transformation, responding to particular faith commitments and communities. They write:

> No teacher is excused from an accountability to human well-being. No pastor can be unconcerned about all persons' dignity and be competent, no discipline or practice of ministry falls outside the realm of accountability to the common good. In so far as theological education benefits primarily those persons who have institutional power or who are heirs to power by virtue of race, gender, or class, it is bad education.[18]

No other denomination gives its seminaries more freedom and responsibility to speak out; to speak out through the curriculum and teaching that prepares women and men for pastoral leadership; to speak out through research and its results widely disseminated; to speak out through the involvement of faculty in congregations, denominational bodies, and commissions,

providing the biblical and theological context so lacking in much of our discourse and decision making.

Harking back to the earlier reference to Richard Niebuhr's definition of a seminary as the intellectual center of the church's life, Jim Waits has written:

> By intellectual center Niebuhr meant that the school makes connections; it thinks wholistically, not randomly or piecemeal. It reflects deeply and imaginatively about all sorts of things in behalf of the church and its mission. It does not pander to the superficialities of church life. It reaches back into the rich resources of the church's biblical and historical tradition. It analyzes and weighs and assesses that history. And it instructs the church. In so doing, it points the way past the mere institutional prescriptions of the church to passionate clarity about the church's mission and its integrity in the modern world.[10]

Indeed, where else can the church go to do its intellectual work? Indeed, where else should it go in light of its establishment of thirteen intellectual centers for "clarification of the church's faith through research and prophetic inquiry of the whole church?" I sense in the past four years an increasing realization within the church of the valuable resources it has in our theological schools to address vital issues that cannot be avoided by a church seeking to engage the culture and world in which it lives and for which its Lord lived and died. The bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear weapons; the Commission to Study the Ministry; the forthcoming pastoral message on vital congregations; the Commission to Study the Mission of the Church—these are beginnings, however modest, of the church relying on the scholarship and research of the seminary communities. The times call out for greater initiative on the part of the seminaries to make their rich resources available to the church. The Board of Higher Education and Ministry is prepared to assist you in an increased initiative to the church because the laity are hungry to be fed, and I fear those with stale bread and bad wine will feed them. Let us not assume that the love/hate syndrome of the church toward its institutions is dominant. Especially among a growing number of episcopal leaders is there an appreciation and desire to hear from the seminaries if the seminaries are prepared to address an awesome agenda that includes human sexuality, racism, and sexism, globalization, poverty, economic and civil justice, and the environment to name only some.

If the seminaries are prepared is a key question you can best answer. Are you prepared to train students and speak to the church more intentionally about the study of other religious traditions; undertake analysis of social ills that plague the land and deny the gospel; appreciate the remarkable changes in scientific understanding of the universe, matter and being; renew cultivation of the imagination that finds life-giving power in art, music, and literature; prepare students for the teaching office of their ministry as a major step to overcoming the biblical illiteracy that hungers for food in all congregations. This, I submit, cannot be accomplished through more add-ons to the curriculum—the bane of all deans, but through a revitalization of what you are now doing that it be shaped and focused on the mission of God's ministers and God's people in a new age.

I close with a report about one of our seminary students.

Recently, in a metropolitan hospital a young man dying from AIDS took a sudden turn for the worse. Abandoned by his family, the nurses on his case felt a pastor should be contacted. It happened that one came through to visit a parishioner and was asked if he would stop and visit with the man. He agreed. He went to the room, but he would not enter. Rather, standing in the hallway, he shouted a prayer at the top of his voice, seeking God's forgiveness upon this prodigal son.

A young seminarian who was doing CPE was told of the incident. Immediately she went to the room, entered, and gently talking, held him in her arms until he died.

Her friends later inquired: "Sally, whatever did you do during that long wait?"

"Oh," she replied, "I prayed; I quoted Scripture; I sang hymns; and I kept telling him how very much God loved him."

The state of ordained ministry and the state of theological education in the United Methodist Church is far better and of greater quality than its critics claim.

That's why the church expects help from the seminaries in renewing the ministry as a profession; in establishing closer connections to congregational life; and in providing leadership for a renewed understanding of mission in the contemporary world.

That mission can be defined no more vividly than the community of faith reaching out in a variety of creative ministries to hurting, hopeless people—gently talking and holding them in their arms, singing hymns, praying, quoting Scripture, and telling them how very much God loves them.

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Notes

1. *Northern Illinois Study*, Gary Peluso, director, p. 1.
2. *Book of Discipline*, 1988, p. 208.
3. F. Thomas Trotter, *Loving God with One's Mind*, p. 291.
4. *Book of Discipline*, 1988, pp. 595-596.
5. Jackson Carroll, Dean Hoge, and Francis Sheets, *Patterns of Parish Leadership*, p. 89 ff.
6. John Cobb in *Beyond Clericalism*, Joseph Hough and Barbara Wheeler, editors, p. 24 ff.
7. Ibid., p. 27.
8. Trotter, pp. 265-266.
9. Ronald Osborn, *The Education of Ministers for the Coming Age*, p. 166.
10. Ibid., p. 167.
11. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, p. 107 ff.
12. *Beyond Clericalism*, Hough and Wheeler, editors, p. ix.
13. Marjorie Suchocki in *Beyond Clericalism*, p. 55.
14. Joseph Hough and John Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, pp. 119-121.
15. Loren Mead, "The Christian Century," April 26, 1989, p. 451.
16. Leonard Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, p. 12 ff (private—not for circulation manuscript). Used by permission.
17. Ibid., p. 17.
18. *God's Fierce Whimsy*, The Mudflower Collective, p. 33.
19. Jim L. Waits, "Church and School: Promises to Keep," p. 2.